

Testimony Public Health Committee

2/26/07

SB 80

Sen. Handley, Rep. Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee. Thank you for hearing SB 80 AAC Youth Camp Licensure Requirements and Certain Boys and Girls Clubs Operating Drop-In Center" Programs.

For many years the Boys and Girls Club of New Britain has operated a free summer youth recreation program on a drop-in center, open door, model. This program is run at the Boys and Girls Club in the downtown area of New Britain. The over whelming majority of young attendees are from the poorest neighborhoods of the city and on any given day attendance may be from 150 to 300 young people between the ages of 6 and 18. Over the years the program has run without significant problems.

In 2003 the state Department of Health classified this program as a "youth camp" and sighted the Club for operating without a license. In order to comply with DPH licensing requirements, particularly staff ratio mandates, the Club would have to meet a strict set of administrative standards, which would most likely lead to the termination of the program. As a result, the Club has resisted this designation and compliance with licensing. For the past two years the program has operated under the city's umbrella, exempt from DPH licensing requirements.

Since there is no statutory recognition of the drop-in, open enrollment model, the club finds itself in the dilemma of trying to continue to operate its summer program, while being found in violation of the state's "youth camp" designation. Compliance with those standards would require more than a doubling of staff, the imposition of a \$40 to \$50 per week per child fee, the requirement of a medical exam by each participant, the addition of a full time medically certified staff person, an on-call doctor and additional staff and administrative requirements.

DPH maintains that these requirements will ensure a safer environment for the Club's summer program participants and I can appreciate the department's dedication to that objective. Unfortunately, the new fees, added restrictions and administrative burdens will actually result in hundreds of young people being deprived of a viable summer recreational experience. These kids can not afford the fees; the staff will not be hired; enrollment will drop dramatically and hundreds of young people, who could otherwise be participating in a rewarding summer program, will be left to seek other activity on the streets of New Britain. This is clearly not a safe or healthy alternative.

Committee members, I ask that you consider the intended impact of this bill and vote it favorably out of committee.